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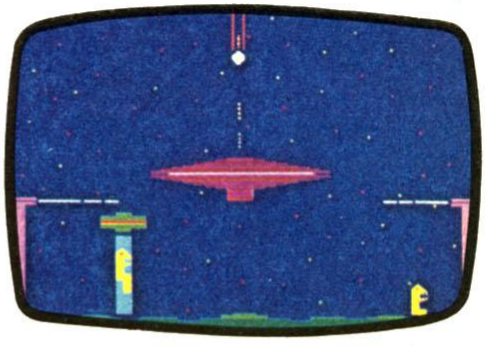

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Screen Magic

Wave after wave of alien spacecraft invade the underwater city of Atlantis. Centuries of civilization seem doomed. You're in charge of the city's defense, guarding the skies with your missile bases. You'd better make every shot count!

That's ATLANTIS, a new video game from Imagic. It's made for both the Atari and Intellivision home systems. *Billboard* Magazine reports that the Atari edition is one of the nation's most popular video games.

ATLANTIS was designed and programmed by 26-year-old Pat Ransil, Senior Systems Engineer at Imagic. Where does Pat get his ideas for games? How does he go about programming a game? What makes one game a hit and another a bore?

We visited Pat at the Imagic headquarters in Los Gatos, California, not long ago, to get the answers to those questions. Pat's spacious office was filled with computer gear. One system was named Merlin, perhaps because of the magical works it performs.

"I personally like quick-reaction games rather than those that rely on complicated strategy," Pat said. "Success in ATLANTIS depends on your ability to react fast and manipulate the controls accordingly. You have to act *now!* That's the type of game I like."

Pat grew up in Saratoga, California, about fifty miles south of San Francisco. He attended schools there and then went on to the University of California in Berkeley. Then he received a combined degree in electrical engineering and computer science.

After college, Pat joined Intel, working in the development of microprocessors. He also helped design computer systems and software programs for Intel's customers.

Pat had always been interested in video games. He often played them at lunch or after work. BATTLEZONE was his favorite, but he also liked PAC-MAN, MISSILE COMMAND, and CENTIPEDE.

Pat was curious about the games, but he had no ambition at the time to become a designer. Then Brian Dougherty, who had been a classmate of Pat's at the University of California, approached him with an offer.

Dougherty and a few others were forming a new company, to be called Imagic. It would be involved in the design of video game software—game cartridges that could be used with the Atari and Intellivision systems. Dougherty asked Pat whether he would like to join the group, and Pat said yes.

The new company's games offered elaborate graphics, combined with nonstop action. They were easy to learn but hard to master. Success came fast. In one year, Imagic grew from nine to 86 employees.

Pat spends a good deal of his time in arcades, watching kids play games. "I try to determine why they'll line up to play one game, but completely reject another," he says.

"I watch how a kid reacts when a game is over. One hallmark of a good game is when a kids says, 'I know what I did wrong. I won't make that mistake next time.'

"When I see a kid walk away from a game disgustedly, I try to find out what caused that to happen. The kid might tell me that the enemy that had zapped him appeared suddenly and randomly, and there was no chance for him to escape. You can't permit this to happen in a game.

"I'm also interested in finding out what types of kids play which games, and the reasons. There are some games that smaller kids—ages 8 or 9 or so—enjoy. PAC-MAN, for instance. They're games

that are easy to understand, and have simple controls.

"Older kids—from 14 to 18, say—like more complex games, such as DEFENDER or STARGATE. In these, several different controls have to be mastered."

Ideas for new games at Imagic usually come out of formal "game-storming" sessions that the company schedules for designers. These meetings usually last several days and are held at a resort hotel. "We want to get as far away from the telephone and other office distractions as we can," Pat says.

The session opens with a general discussion of game ideas. Suggestions come up for action games, driving games, educational games, space games, and shoot-'em-up games.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

"Then we get more specific," Pat says. "A game designer will pinpoint a game idea, give the game a name, and draw on a blackboard some of the elements the game might contain. Everyone else listens, takes notes, and makes suggestions.

"The next day, the various ideas are considered in smaller groups. In these sessions, everyone examines each idea from several different standpoints. Will the idea win consumer acceptance? What is going to be involved in programming the idea? What engineering is going to be necessary?

"When we get back to the office from one of these sessions, we've got a lot of ideas buzzing in our heads. Then there are more discussions. Maybe several of us will be at an arcade and one of us will say, 'Remember such-and-such an idea? Well this is what we could do with it.' And he'll use an arcade game to demonstrate what he's thinking.

Or in meetings at the office, different twists will be suggested for ideas that were first suggested at the game-storming sessions. Little by little, the ideas evolve. A designer is assigned to develop each of those ideas that look as though they might be successful."

There are several differences between arcade games and those designed for home systems. Designers have to keep aware of these differences.

"The arcade game," Pat says, "has to be designed to play for only ninety seconds, at least as far as the beginning player is concerned. At that point, the player 'loses,' and another quarter has to be inserted.

"There's nothing like that in the case of cartridges played at home. Your chief motive is to make the game enjoyable. You make it last for hours, if you want.

"The designer also has to be aware of the pluses and minuses of the system he's designing for. Take Imagic's DEMON ATTACK, for instance, a game in which you attempt to destroy wave after wave of bird-like demons. DEMON ATTACK was first designed for the Atari VCS. One of the features of the VCS is that it permits smooth and easy movement across the screen in a horizontal direction. Vertical movement, on the other hand, can be troublesome. So, when Rob Fulop designed DEMON ATTACK for the Atari system, he programmed the demons to move on a horizontal plane.

"But when designing the Intellivision version, Gary Kato found that he was not so limited. He could provide demon movement in any direction—and he did."

The color of the demons provides another example of how a system's electronics can influence game design. In the Atari version of DEMON ATTACK, the

demons are of many different colors, because the Atari system is able to provide for this. But the Intellivision system isn't. The Intellivision demons never display more than two colors.

Once Pat has a game concept in mind, he begins programming it. All programs at Imagic are written in assembler.

Assembler is a language that's very close to the computer's own internal language. It's much more difficult to learn than BASIC, the language most home computers respond to. It takes thousands of calculations per second to animate objects on a video screen at high speed. If you tried it in BASIC, the computer would take several seconds to move something a tiny space on the screen. Assembler is one of the languages that assure rapid, smooth movement of the screen characters.

"I learned assembler at college," Pat says. "It was a required subject for anyone who majored in computer science.

"Being skilled in assembler is a beginning for someone who wants to design video games. But you also have to have an appreciation of game play. You have to know what makes a game enjoyable.

"You have to be able to give the players the idea that if they can reach a certain level of skill, they can control their destinies on the screen. In other words, you can never permit a player to be wiped out just haphazardly.

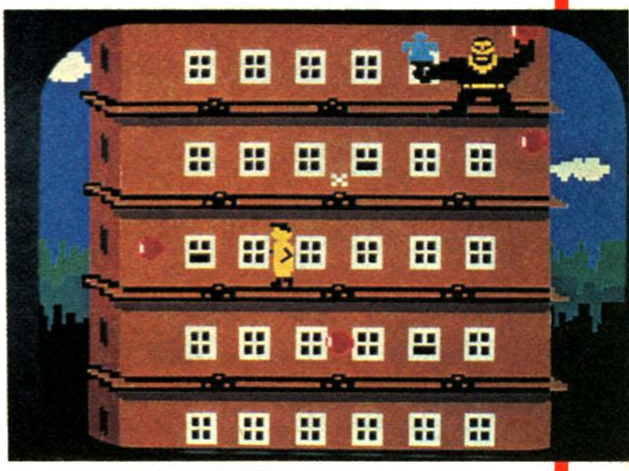
"A designer also has to have a good sense of graphics," Pat says. "When I'm interviewing designers for a job, I'll explain the graphics tools we have available, and then I'll ask them to demonstrate their ability with the equipment.

"I'll also ask them to describe some game idea, and to sketch the central figures. I just want to determine whether the person is capable of using sketches to communicate the idea.

"You also have to be highly motivated, a real self-starter. There is no time-clock here; no one checks when you come in or when you leave. No one checks to see how many pages of work you might have turned out in a given period. It's up to you to accept the responsibility for the development of a particular game, and make that game as good as you can.

"Designers are given a free rein in deciding when they want to work and for how long. Imagic's main computer is in operation twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Each designer has his or her own terminal. If a designer wants to work a schedule of from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M., Monday through Friday, that's fine. But some designers prefer to start work at four in the afternooon and work through the night until breakfast. That's OK, too.

"Many people contribute in the designing of a game, even though one designer is in charge. For example, I may be in my office programming, and someone may walk in, watch my screen for a while, and say, 'Hey, what do you think about this?', and make a suggestion. That's how some of our best ideas result.



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

"Take my ATLANTIS game. It opens in mid-day, goes through the evening hours, and then nighttime comes and the sky is black. You see the enemy only by means of searchlights. Lighting the sky in that manner was the idea of Mike Becker, one of our graphics specialists. That's the way games get created. It's a team effort."

The music that accompanies a game has to be chosen with great care. "A little tune that seems delightful when you hear

it once or twice can get on your nerves when you hear it over and over," Pat says. "Sound can be a two-edged sword. It can add to your enjoyment, but you can easily overdo it."

Once the designer has written the basic program, he or she begins "ramping up" the game, that is, taking it through its various screens or boards, making each a little bit more difficult than the one before.

The next step is to create different versions of the game. There can be easy, difficult, and more difficult versions. Or there can be options for one, two, three, or four players. There can be, in fact, dozens of different options of various kinds.

After several months of grueling work, the game program runs to many thousands of lines. Each line is densely packed with strings of letters and numbers that make up instructions for the computer.

Assembly-line workers at Imagic

If a letter or number is out of place within those thousands of lines, the program will not work properly. Many more long, hard hours go into getting the mistakes—called "bugs"—out of the program.

As the game is beginning to reach its final stage of development, it is tested by the marketing department. Pat told BLIP, "We get groups of kids together at several different locations around the country to try out any new game.

"The kids play the game and then they're interviewed. We ask them, 'Did you understand the game? Did you enjoy it? What did you like about it? What was there about it that you disliked? Is it similar to other games you own? If a game such as this were available, would you buy it?'

"If we have a game we're unsure about and it tests poorly, if it doesn't generate very much enthusiasm, we won't produce it. We might try changing it, however. Maybe we'll speed up the action. Or we might make a change in the graphics.

"It's not hard to redo the graphics. We once had a game that involved a mouse chasing cheese, while a cat pursued the mouse. It didn't test very well. So before we started producing it we changed it to a game in which a man picks up treasures, while a dragon shoots fireballs at him. We called it DRAGONFIRE. It got excellent test results and it's been very successful.

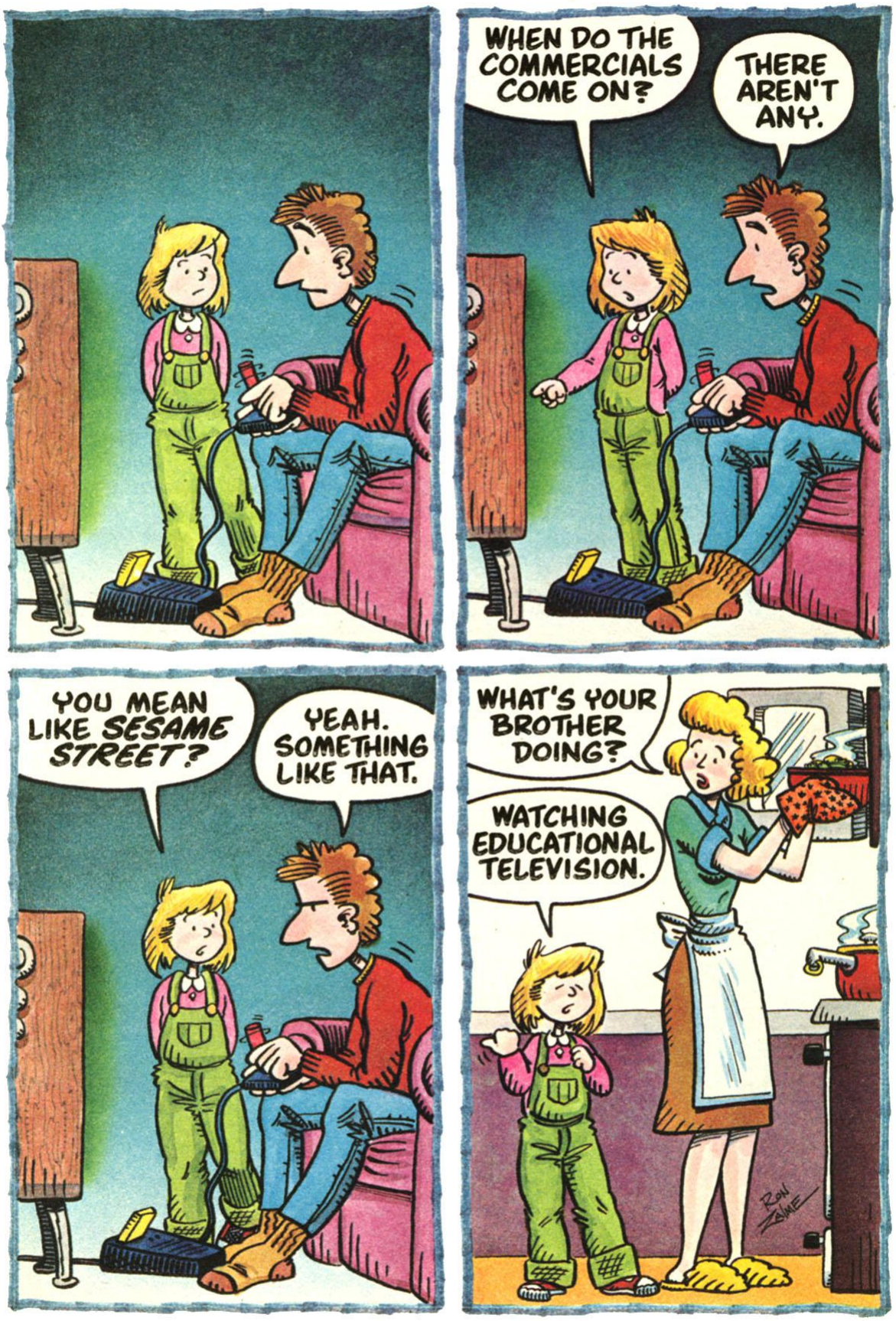
"In the case of a game that we're confident about, we'll put it into production even if it tests poorly. We have a great deal of faith in our knowledge of what makes for a successful game."

It takes three or four months from the time a game idea is hatched until it is put into production.

"Designing games gives me a great deal of satisfaction," Pat says, "much more satisfaction than I get from designing the standard computer program. Normally, when you design a program, the result is a printout. But with a video game, you get a graphic representation of the program on the screen; you get something that is pleasing to the eye.

"Then, after the game is produced in cartridge form, there can be even greater rewards. You can walk into a store where they sell game software, and they might be demonstrating a game you designed. You see kids playing it and having fun. I like to see that. It gives you a good feeling to know you have created something that can give enjoyment to others."

BLIP Interview by George Sullivan


WHEN DO THE COMMERCIALS COME ON?
THERE AREN'T ANY.
YOU MEAN LIKE SESAME STREET?
YEAH. SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
WHAT'S YOUR BROTHER DOING?
WATCHING EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION.
RON JAIME

BLIP TIPS!

RIVER RAID

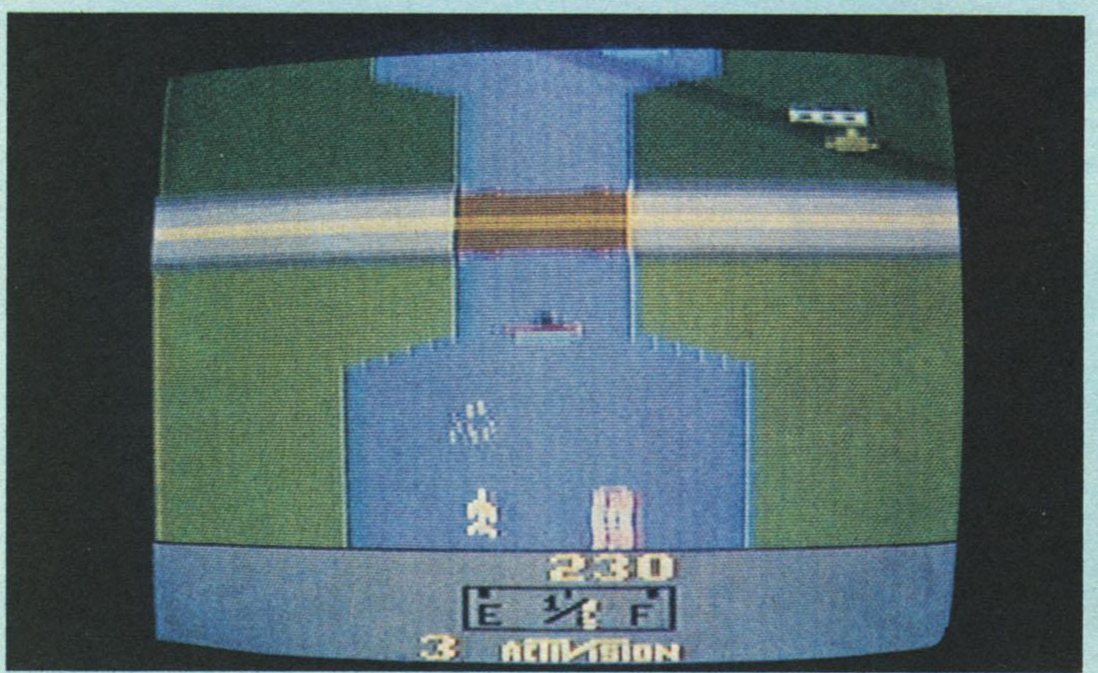
Anyone with a video game system knows there are hundreds of shoot-em-up games in the stores to choose from. The broad selection makes it very hard to pick the hits from the bombs without actually seeing the games in operation.

So it's good to be able to report that there's one game you can definitely count on, even if you've never seen it. Activision has come up with a hit in one of their latest releases, RIVER RAID.

The game, for one or two players, is the first from designer Carol Shaw. The promotional material says that it's a battle-and-adventure game that calls for the skill of a pilot, the mind of a strategist, and the stamina of a fighter. We'll go along with that.

The game play is fast and furious, calling on flying skill, a sense of timing, and a quick firing finger. RIVER RAID also has the best one-way scrolling screen we've seen since Coleco's ZAXXON cartridge.

It's one of those games that seem simple at first. This allows you to get into the action right away. But as the game goes on, a bunch of random factors make the challenge more and more difficult.



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

You use your joystick to pilot a stratowing assault jet over a constantly changing, danger-filled river course. The left player's jet is yellow, and the right player's is black.

Moving the joystick left or right causes the left or right wing to tilt and the plane to move in that direction. Moving the stick forward increases your speed, and backward decreases it.

The action button launches missiles

out of the nose of the jet as you proceed down the river. Your mission is to make your way down the river while blowing up enemy gunships, helicopters, jet marauders, bridges, and oil depots. While doing all this, you have to avoid not only crashing, but also running out of fuel.

As any good scrolling game should, RIVER RAID includes one of the most challenging features of a good up-to-date game: the unknown screen. If you've played some of the current maze, flying, space, or adventure games, you know the excitement that comes from not knowing what's going to crop up on the screen in the next few seconds. In fact, a lot of players these days seem to be much more interested in which level or screen they reach than in their scores.

The unknown screen is a major attraction in RIVER RAID. With 48 different river sections, it will be a long time before you begin to tire of the game. Each section includes variables such as land mass size, number of ships and planes, and fuel tank placement. With so many factors changing, it will be a long time before you completely master the game.

Here's how the scoring works for destroying enemies in RIVER RAID:

	POINTS
Tanker	30
Helicopter	60
Fuel Depot	80
Enemy Jet	100
Bridge	500

You start the game with four planes. For every 10,000 points you score, you get an extra plane.

TACTICS

● Keep control of your speed at all times. The normal cruising speed is often what you want. But there are dozens of situations that call for an increase in speed, or a decrease that will allow you to anticipate the enemy's movements.

● When the path in front of you is congested, you can get rapid-fire by holding the action button down. When a shot hits something or leaves the screen, another is released immediately.

● The first screen is the only one that has nothing but stationary objects impeding you. When you blow up your first bridge, you'll approach the second river. Suddenly, everything has begun to move, except for the fuel tanks. Enemy jets zoom across the screen, and you now have to begin maneuvering, in addition to firing.

This second river is also the first time you see islands, bays, and narrow channels in the river. You have to avoid these, as well as the enemies in the air.

● You use fuel at a constant rate, no matter how fast or slow your plane moves. Keep an eye on the fuel gauge at the bottom of the screen, which registers *"E, ½, F."* When you begin approaching *"Empty,"* you'll hear a sound that warns you to refuel.

You do this by flying over a fuel depot, which automatically fills your tank. The slower your speed over the depot, the more fuel you receive. A bell sounds when you're refueling, and it becomes higher-pitched when you're full.

● When you're finished refueling, you can blow up the depot by hitting the action button.

● As you travel down the river, you find fewer and fewer fuel depots. So, as the game goes on, you should keep a more watchful eye on your fuel gauge.

● The difficulty switch determines whether you have control over the course your missiles take. If the switch is in the *"A"* position, the missiles fly straight. If it's the *"B"* position, you can steer them with your joystick after they're launched.

—Brian Scott

BLIP TIPS II

Q* BERT is one of the newer releases from Gottlieb Amusement Games, and it's causing quite a commotion in arcades around the country. Why? Well, to put it simply, there is no other video game like it.

Q*BERT is one of those games you'd have to file under the category of *Cute*. It has a lot in common with PAC-MAN—a loveable main character you can identify with, a bunch of goony villains trying to trip him up, and a simple play concept that allows players of any age to enjoy it.

The characters in Q*BERT are done in bright colors and fine detail. And then there are the sound effects.

The creatures mumble gibberish throughout the game. If Q*Bert gets crushed, he mutters angrily to himself, very much like Popeye in the old cartoons. And if he takes a wrong step and plummets into space, his fall is accompanied by a high-pitched shriek.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

The playing surface of Q*BERT is one side of a three-dimensional pyramid made up of vividly colored blocks. Q*BERT himself is a cuddly little orange creature.

He has a furry round body, thin legs, and a huge snout of a nose.

You use your controller to hop Q*Bert from one block to another. When he hops onto a block, it changes to a "target" color. When all the cubes have been changed to the target color, he has completed one board and he moves on to another.

Four boards make up one level. There are nine different levels, and they become more difficult as you move on. You start the game with three Q*Berts. You get an extra one at 8,000 points, and then at each additional 14,000 points.

Now, of course, the game isn't just a matter of hopping from one block to another. There are several enemies

waiting to ambush our furry little orange friend. They are:

Coily the Snake: He starts at the top of the screen as a large purple ball. The ball bounces down to the bottom of the pyramid, then hesitates a moment. Suddenly, it turns into an evil (but goofy-looking) spring-like snake that follows Q*Bert around the board.

Small Red Spheres: These fall at random from the top of the screen and land in the second row of cubes. Then they bounce down the steps of the playing board and fall off the screen. Q*Bert has to stay out of their bouncing path, or he'll be bopped on the head and destroyed.

Sam and Slick: These are tiny, mumbling green creatures that hop down the board in random patterns. They change cubes from the target color back to their original color. Q*Bert must stop them quickly to keep their destructive work to a minimum.

Ugg and Wrong-Way: They're oddly-shaped purple monsters who "fall up" and across the cubes. They'll crush anything in their path, including Q*Bert.

On #level 1, Q*Bert has only the red spheres and Coily to worry about. Ugg and Wrong-Way first come in on the third board, Sam and Slick on the fourth. (Slick, by the way, is the one with the stylish sunglasses.)

Level 2 includes the same enemies, but has an additional challenge. Q*Bert has to change the color of each block twice. Later levels use variations of this two-color scheme.

Levels 3 to 9 add a new twist. Q*Bert now has to avoid blocks that have been changed to the target color. If he hops on one, it will change back to the original color. With this added complication, you have to think more carefully about where to jump in order to avoid various dangers.

TACTICS

1 Q*Bert can't destroy Ugg, Wrong-Way, or the red spheres. He can only stay out of their way. All he has to do to get rid of Sam and Slick is hop on them. They will then vanish from the screen.

Getting rid of Coily is a bit more difficult. Q*Bert has to make his way toward one of the discs that float in space, apart from the pyramid. As Coily closes in, Q*Bert leaps out onto the disc, which will carry him back up to the top of the pyramid. Coily will mindlessly continue following Q*Bert, but he'll plunge over the edge, as Q*Bert floats to safety. In order for this tactic to work, Coily has to be within three hops of Q*Bert before the little fellow leaps onto the disc.

2 It's a good idea to have a hopping pattern in mind before each board begins. You can mentally divide the board into several smaller areas, then try to complete one area at a time. Try to cover as much of one area as possible before being forced to use up one of your discs to get away from Coily.

3 The key to avoiding Ugg and Wrong-Way is to beware of the lower corners. The two monsters enter the board from those two points. It will take a while to learn the awkward way the two move across the board. Once you do, you'll get better at staying away from them.

4 Don't spend too much time on the second row of cubes. This is where the red spheres land when they fall in from space.

5 Patience is much more important than speed in this game. Sometimes it's best to stand still for a moment as an enemy approaches. This gives you a chance to see which way he's moving, and it can help you avoid him.

6 There's one aid for Q*Bert that we haven't mentioned, because you never know when it's going to appear. It's a tiny green "freeze ball." When it drops down from the top of the screen, Q*Bert can hop onto it, and the entire board freezes—except for him. While everything else is frozen, he's free to move quickly and complete as much of the board as he can. When you hear a change in the music, that's the signal that the effects of the freeze-ball are about to wear out. Then you get back on guard again.

All these tips were prepared with the assistance of Bill Schumacer, a student at the University of Pennsylvania who averages over a million points a game. He asked us to leave you with one important thought about Q*Bert. The only way you'll improve your game is through practice.

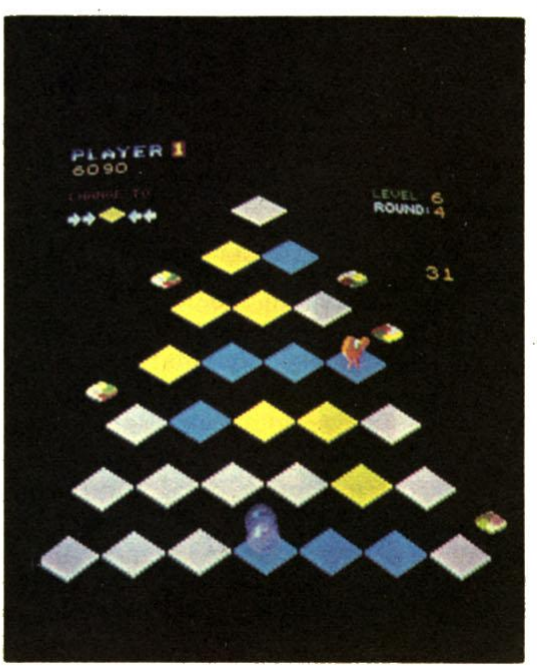
His tips, however, should be a big help.

Q*BERT IS HOMEWARD BOUND

Q*BERT recently joined the ranks of popular arcade games that have been translated into home versions. Parker Brothers has the license to create Q*BERT cartridges for the Atari 2600 and Intellivision systems. The expected release date for these two cartridges is July. An Atari 5200 version is planned for release in September.

As you might expect, there are also plans for a whole series of products tied in with the Q*BERT character. You can expect T shirts, stuffed dolls, and school supplies. Anyone for an Ugg and Wrong-Way lunchbox?

—Mike Meyers



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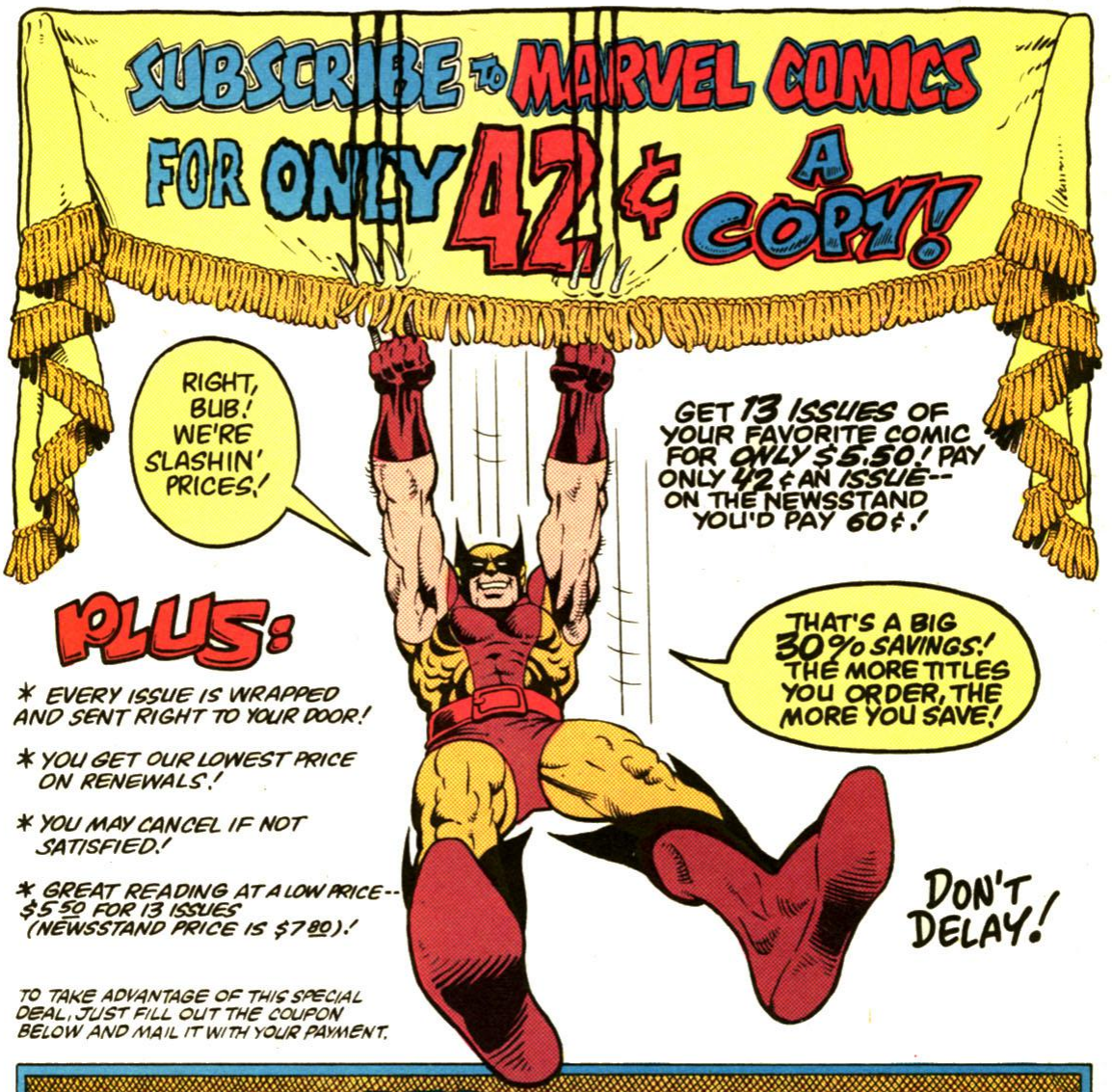
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FRONT RUNNERS

BEST SELLERS BEST SELLERS

Here it is, arcade aces! BLIP's all-new, exciting feature devoted to the top scores, top games and top players. Is your favorite game listed here? If not, write us, and we'll try to look up the statistics for you!

Home games

1. MS. PAC-MAN (Atari)
2. PITFALL (Activision)
3. RIVER RAID (Activision)
4. VANGUARD (Atari)
5. FROGGER (Parker Brothers)
6. DONKEY KONG (Coleco)
7. PHOENIX (Atari)
8. PAC-MAN (Atari)
9. SPIDER FIGHTER (Activision)
10. DRAGONFIRE (Imagic)

Arcade games

1. TIME PILOT (Centuri)
2. JOUST (Williams)
3. FRONT LINE (Taito)
4. Q*BERT (Gottlieb)
5. MOON PATROL (Williams)
6. MILLIPEDE (Atari)
7. JUNGLE HUNT (Taito)
8. SUPER PAC-MAN (Bally)
9. SUBROC 3-D (Sega)
10. MS. PAC-MAN (Midway)

UP-AND-COMERS

Home Systems: BLIP's pick hit for home games this month is Mattel's adaptation of the popular arcade game, BURGER TIME. Since we first saw it, we've thought that BURGER TIME was one of the funniest and most interesting video games around. And because it's a simple game, it should translate very well into both the Intellivision and VCS systems.

Arcades: Here's a game with spectacular graphics, action that is complex but easy to learn, and Trak-Ball precision controls. It's Atari's LIBERATOR. We think space games have kind of been forgotten with the introduction of humorous and adventure games. But LIBERATOR combines the speed of TEMPEST with the precision of MISSILE COMMAND. The result is totally original, and definitely *not* cute. Space games may be way out there, but they definitely are not on the way out.

CAN YOU TOP THIS?

Here are some scores to beat on the most popular arcade games. They were supplied to us by the TWIN GALAXIES INTERNATIONAL VIDEO GAMES SCOREBOARD.

TIME PILOT:	1,892,000
JOUST:	7,253,150
FRONT LINE:	187,000
Q*BERT:	13,454,625
MOON PATROL:	577,480

FRONT RUNNERS

ON THE SHELVES RIGHT NOW: Some of the games that are just being released include MYSTIC CASTLE (Mattel), TAC-SCAN (Sega), PIZZA CHEF (ZiMag) and WINGS (CBS Video Games).

HERE IS OUR VIEW OF WHICH ARCADE GAMES ARE HOT, AND WHICH ARE DEFINITELY *NOT*.
Hot: POPEYE (Nintendo) and POLE POSITION (Atari).
Not: TEMPEST (Atari) and BERZERK (Stern).

BLIP'S PLAYER OF THE MONTH:

Our first player of the month is a familar face here at Marvel. We all know about the Twin Galaxies scoreboard. But what we didn't know until recently is that one of the names on that scoreboard is our own Captain America artist, MIKE ZECK. Mike holds the world record in double credit OMEGA RACE!

The last time Mike was in the office, BLIP asked him some questions about his video-gaming fame.

BLIP: How did you become such a great OMEGA RACE player?

MIKE: My sister, Cyndee, and I used to spend some of our idle time together at the game rooms. None of the games were particularly addicting to me until OMEGA RACE appeared. Not only was it fun, but it seemed to allow the player more control options.

Well, it became something of a challenge and I was soon playing that game every week! After a year or so, I was getting the high scores on most of the machines I played. I set a personal goal to break the 2,000,000 mark, since I hadn't seen that done before.

Then I found out about the Twin Galaxies scoreboard. I called them, and asked what the double credit OMEGA RACE high score was. What I found out was that mine was higher!

Zeck, by Zeck

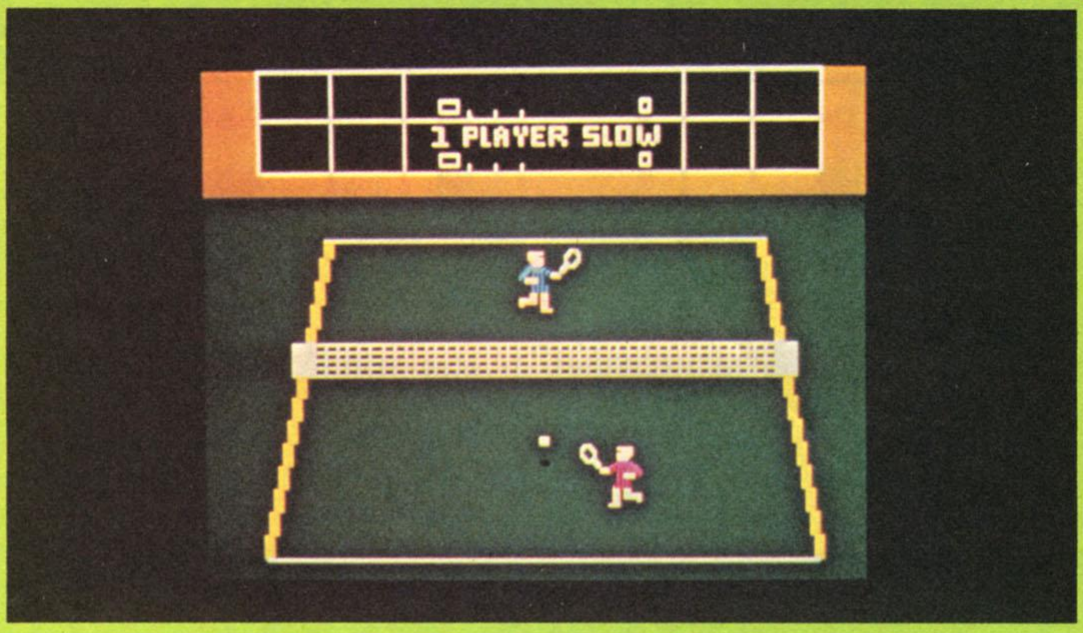
BLIP: What is your score?

MIKE: 2,538,250.

BLIP: Are you going to shoot for an even higher score?

MIKE: I'd like to make it to 3,000,000 points. But keeping my game in that condition takes a lot of practice, and the more hours I spend at the game room, the less time I have for the drawing board. So I'm not making any wild predictions at this point. My deadlines have to come before breaking any records. Actually, my sister Cyndee is getting pretty good. She might break my high score and force me into retirement!

Player's Choice



REALSPORTS TENNIS

We told you all about Atari RealSports BASEBALL in a past issue. We thought the game was all right, but it didn't really live up to the name "RealSports."

But now, there is a RealSports cartridge that does live up to the name. It's RealSports TENNIS, and it's the best sports game we've seen in a long time.

Imagine a real game of tennis. You need an arsenal of shots, quick feet, and just the right touch to send the ball flying back toward your opponent. Some of your serves are hard, others gentle. Sometimes you run to the net, and smash the ball right back toward your opponent. Other times, you lean back and wait, lobbing a forehand shot over your opponent's head.

The problem with most video tennis games is that they allow none of these complex actions. Many tennis games have decent graphics. They feature three-dimensional effects, realistic-looking players, and fast action. But they aren't really tennis. No matter how good the graphics were on tennis games in the past, they really were nothing more than dressed-up versions of PONG.

RealSports TENNIS has changed all that. The graphics are the best we've ever seen on an Atari VCS cartridge. And the sports action is incredibly complex and realistic. The realism even extends right down to the scoreboard.

This isn't a simple game to play, either. The one-player version, in which you play against the computer, is a tough game, and it usually takes about thirty minutes to complete an entire match.

But the one-player game is no match for the two-player version. In one-player, you can learn the automatic placement of shots, and predict how the computer will respond. Not so in two-player.

The two-player game is all skill. Just as in real tennis, you must use all your wits to fake out your opponent, to get him to the wrong side of the court. The thrill of victory, outmaneuvering your opponent, and the increased difficulty are all present here. Unlike the one-player game, there are no set moves or shots you can make to guarantee beating the computer, because you are playing against a real person.

THREE MORE FROM ATARI

Atari has a bunch of other new games you should also know about. Another RealSports game, SOCCER, was a big disappointment to us, especially after playing TENNIS. The difference between the two games is vast. SOCCER's action is slow and predictable. Playing the game involves nothing more than a little bit of simple joystick maneuvering, which you can master in minutes.

The reason RealSports SOCCER can't come close to TENNIS is scrolling. The SOCCER game features a moving playfield. In TENNIS, the court stays stationary. Apparently, the designers of SOCCER were forced to commit a lot of computer memory to the basics of the game, rather than to making it truly special.

The other new Atari games are both arcade adaptations. They're both also a lot of fun to play.

PHOENIX and CENTIPEDE are well-known arcade hits. But popularity doesn't always guarantee that game designers will be able to translate a game into an authentic home version.

The problem with adapting arcade games to the VCS format is that the Atari machine has limited memory. Many arcade fans find the adaptations difficult to play and very disappointing. In DEFENDER, for example, VCS players complained that action was just impossibly slow, and the entire board seemed to flicker and fade at times. The flickering problem is also present in Atari's version of PAC-MAN.

Sad to say, that problem isn't quite licked. And it might never be. Flickering occurs when there is too much happening on the screen, and the cartridge's memory is spread too thin. In CENTIPEDE, the flickering occurs when the bugs have reached the bottom of the screen. That's when there are lots of mushrooms, and the spider appears.

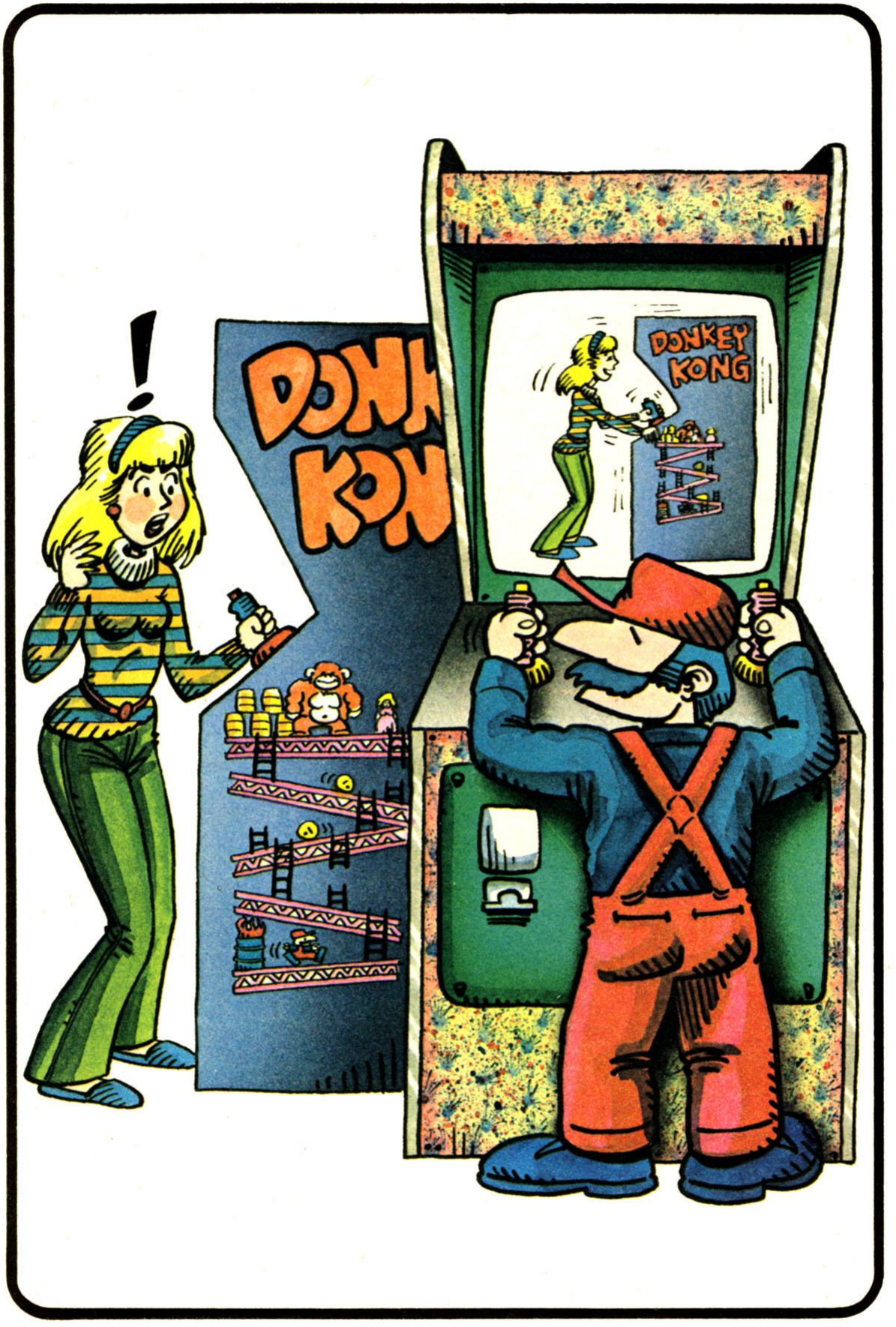
But we said CENTIPEDE is a good game, and it is. The flickering, although a bother, isn't nearly as much of a problem as you might expect. What Atari has done is capture the arcade feel of CENTIPEDE as best they can. And they seem to have pushed the limits of the VCS system even further. The game plays very much like the real CENTIPEDE, and is well suited to the Atari controllers.

Atari's other new adaptation, PHOENIX, doesn't suffer from any kind of flickering problem. PHOENIX is another instance of the arcade "feel" captured extremely well, right down to the sound effects and the final battle with the mother-ship.

The big question for PHOENIX fans is this: Can Atari's genuine adaptation beat Imagic's derivation, DEMON ATTACK? The answer is yes and no. DEMON ATTACK for Intellivision is definitely the best of the lot. But VCS players have a tougher choice to make.

DEMON ATTACK for Atari bears almost no resemblance to its cousin for Mattel systems. The initial action of VCS DEMON ATTACK is probably a bit faster than the opening salvos of PHOENIX. But DEMON ATTACK for Atari features no final, go-for-it-all battle with an awe-inspiring mother-ship.

Both DEMON ATTACK for Intellivision and Atari's PHOENIX do include this battle. It is the final battle that makes both of these games more than just GALAXIAN spin-offs. And it is this final battle that makes Atari's PHOENIX a game that can stand on its own.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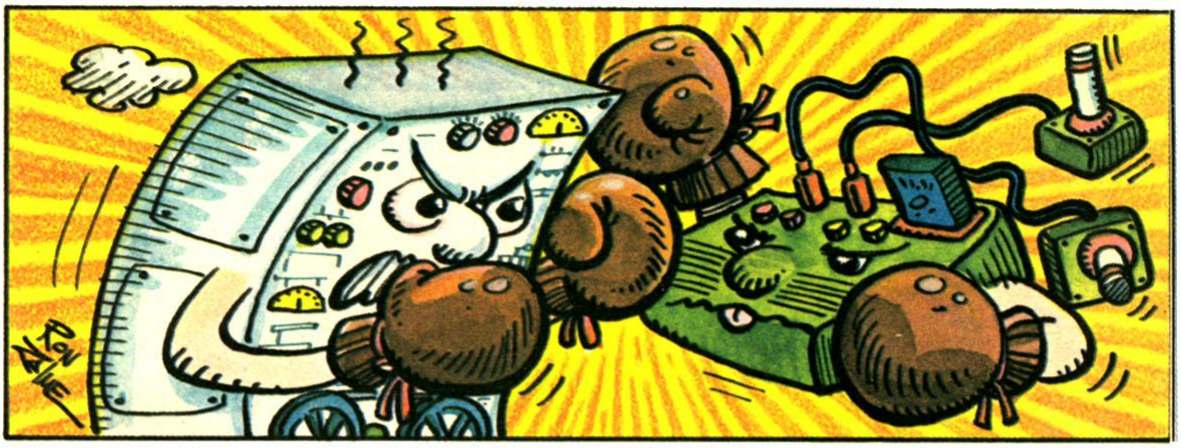

COMPUTER GAMES

Are you looking to buy a good video game system? Can't decide which system would be the best investment? Allow us to make a suggestion. It could be that a home computer is the best choice for you.

If your main interest is in games, here's something to think about. You can play plenty of games if you buy a video games system. But the *potential* for games in the future is greater with any home computer than with any video games systems you could buy. And some computers (like the Atari 400) already have more games on the market than any video games system.

Almost any home computer has graphics and sound capabilities that go far beyond what you'll get in a video game system. And you might be surprised at how little a computer can cost you.

The most popular home computers right now are the Atari 400, the Atari 800, and the VIC 20 from Commodore. All these computers have two important things in common.

First, it's easy for a beginner to hook up one of these machines and start using it immediately. Second, there is a good selection of games available for each one.

How do these games compare to the typical video games? You'll just have to see computer games in action before you'll believe the difference.

Take PAC-MAN as an example. If you've seen the Atari 2600 version of the game, you know it's only a pale imitation of the arcade game that broke all records over a year ago.

The computer version of PAC-MAN is another story. The graphics are beautiful, the levels of play present a real challenge, and you'll have a tough time finding any difference between this version and what you get in an arcade.

If you're ever in a computer store, ask the dealer to show you MINER 2049ER, another Atari computer game. MINER will give you a good idea of how much more is possible with a computer game than a video game system.

MINER is a lot like DONKEY KONG. But DONKEY KONG has four game boards. MINER has ten. And every one of those boards confronts you with a different challenge.

BLIP will be tell you more about computer games in the months to come. In fact, we'll be telling you a lot more about computers in general, in a new column that begins next month.

The list of things you can do with a home computer is a long one, and it gets longer all the time. BLIP will explain these things to you, and help you decide whether you should have a home computer.

How you're going to pay for it is another problem. We can't help you there.

—Lou Diamond

Letters

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WAR GAMES

As a parent, I have to disagree with one statement made by Professor Mitchell Robin in your April issue. Although I agree with most of his statements about video games, I think he misses the mark in ignoring the violent nature of many of these games.

I find it disturbing that so many video games have a war setting. Playing such games could certainly lead some young people to think of war as an activity that can be just as much fun as a game of baseball.

Like Professor Robin, I'm very much in favor in video games. But I don't think it's a good idea to dismiss *every* criticism of the games. Sometimes, the people on the opposite side might be right. I think they are, in their complaints about war games.

John Coppola
San Francisco, CA

We can't argue with what you say. The one bright spot you might concentrate on is that designers seem to be running out of variations on the war-game idea. So maybe we'll be seeing less of war in video games in the months to come.

QUICK TIPS

You had a feature called "Blip Confidential" in the March issue. It was like "Blip Tips," only shorter, with one important tip for each game listed. I tried a couple of the tips, and they worked. Why don't you still have "Blip Confidential"?

Larry Menke
Atlanta, GA

"Blip Confidential" will appear every time we collect a number of quick tips we think you can use. Look for the feature in next month's issue.

ARCADE BUSINESS

In the March "News Blips," you said that video game arcades are losing business. How could that be true? The arcades around here are just as busy as ever.

Phil Brand
Philadelphia, PA

The ones we visit are pretty busy, too. But nationwide, there's been a slowdown in the increase of business. Don't panic, though. We weren't predicting that the arcades were about to disappear. We're sure they're here to stay. They're just going to get more and more competition from home systems.

ADVISE AND CONSENT

Blip has everything I want to know about video games and has actually improved my playing. You're doing a terrific job. Thank you, BLIP.

John Westcott
Nova Scotia, Canada

I like your magazine very much, but I would like to see more about video games and less about computers. I would also like to see less comic book material.

Robert Kellogg
Winterset, IA

Most of our readers have asked for more *about computers and* more *comics. We're trying to keep everybody happy. We hope you'll stick with BLIP for the parts you like.*

ANSWERS TO "KNOW YOUR ENEMY"

In our June issue, we challenged you to match good guys and bad guys with the games they come from. Here's what the completed list should look like:

	Good Guy	Bad Guy
PAC-MAN	10	G
DIG DUG	3	A
DONKEY KONG	7	F
TRON	9	E
FROGGER	2	J
BURGER TIME	5	B
PENGO	1	C
VENTURE	8	D
ZAXXON	6	I
Q*BERT	4	H

FROM COOKIES TO COMPUTERS

Being in the Girl Scouts means more than just selling cookies. A large part of scouting is learning skills in areas like science, athletics, and crafts. One of the subjects you can earn a merit badge in is computers. Although the "Computer Fun" merit badge isn't the most popular yet, it is moving up in the world.

In order to earn the computers badge, scouts have to learn about the electronic age. One of the things a computer scout must do is learn the names of three different computer languages. A computer language is a way of communicating with a computer so that it will do what you tell it to.

One of the other things a scout has to do to earn her badge is to think about the future. She has to talk to a computer expert or write a story about a robot.

Some girl scout troops are taking an interest in computers further than the merit badge. In California, a local council sponsored a technology week. Scouts from all across the country were invited to learn about computers and electronics.

All of this probably means that future scouts will be interested in two kinds of chips: the chocolate ones in the cookies they sell, and the electronic ones in the computers they're learning about.

CALL MY AGENT

Do you know who Herschel Walker is? He's a football player who's making lots of money playing for the New Jersey Generals. One reason Herschel is making all that money is that he has an agent.

An agent is someone who makes business deals for another person. If you were a great baseball player, for example, and you wanted to play for the Yankees, you probably wouldn't just call up George Steinbrenner and offer your services. What you'd probably do is call your agent. Then, your agent would call Steinbrenner. From there, a deal might be made.

Now that video games are so popular, many game designers are becoming stars in their own right. And like many stars of sports and show biz, they are getting agents to represent them.

One of those agents is Malcolm Kaufman. He used to be an executive with Sega, but now he's on his own, running the first video games talent agency. Kaufman figures that the next crop of superstars will be game designers, and he's ready to auction off their services to the highest bidder.

Of course, nobody is sure whether all this is going to work. When you hear that a superstar ballplayer like Reggie Jackson, who makes. his deals through an agent, is going to be playing, that might get you to buy a ticket to a ball game. But do you buy a video game because a certain person designed it? Probably not. The name of the person who created the game isn't nearly as important as the game itself.

Kaufman is one of the people who think this situation is going to change. We're sure a lot of game designers agree with him.

CLOWNING AROUND WITH VIDEO GAMES

There's a circus coming to town that doesn't have a single lion or elephant, and that has no tightrope walkers, acrobats, or jugglers. What it does have is video games, video

games, and still more video games (along with some clowns).

This new kind of circus is called the "World's Largest Arcade and Video Circus and Home of the Arcade World Grand National Championships." (That's a real mouthful!) The show will feature over 1,000 video games, contests to decide who is the best at different games, and the big arcade scoreboard from Walt Day's Twin Galaxies International video games arcade.

All the games will be set on free play, but admission will be $12.00. Besides playing games by yourself and watching the championships, you will get to see the latest in arcade innovations from various manufacturers, and a whole series of different demonstrations for video games players.

One of these demonstrations is specifically for PAC-MAN players. It will feature monkeys that have been trained to maneuver their way through the world's most famous electronic maze. If you dare, you can try to make a monkey out of the trained chimpanzees. But since these animals aren't nearly as prone to distraction as humans, watch out. You might be banished to a lone DONKEY KONG machine, hidden off in a corner somewhere.

When will this spectacular circus come to a city near you? An official schedule hasn't been issued yet, but the show made its debut in Boston on June 3rd. After that, just look for a long line of trucks painted to look like a giant circus train. And listen. A thousand or so video games, all going at once, will be hard to miss.

SOMETHING NEW ON THE MENU

Pizza and video games have always been an unbeatable combination. That much we knew even before Pizza Time Theatres opened up, offering games, food, and a floor show.

Pizza Time has been an incredible success. Many other restaurant chains have tried to repeat that success by offering their own combination of food, games and fun. Now, one of these chains—Tex Critter's Pizza Jamboree Theatre—has gone a step further. They offer pizza and *computers*.

Each TCPJT has many of the same attractions that Pizza Time does. What sets TCPJT apart is a separate computer room, where families can use Apple II computers

for four dollars an hour.

TCPJT still has a long way to go before they catch up to Pizza Time, though. For one thing, Tex Critter's has only about 15 locations, compared to over 200 for Pizza Time.

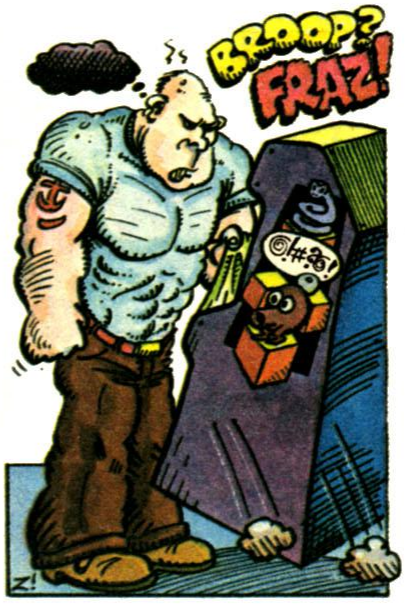
But the smaller chain is hoping that their computer difference will make them popular enough for people everywhere to be able to say, "I'd like a large pizza pie, please—with sausage, pepperoni, and an Apple."

MINI-BLIPS

The average video game player is a teenager with a B average. At least, that's what a new survey commissioned by Atari tells us. Most of the kids in arcades are boys, and most of them spend only a half-hour at a time playing their favorite games. The average amount of money spent in a visit? Just one dollar. That's another indication that business in the arcades is on the way down, thanks mostly to better and better home video games.

One arcade game, however, is still enjoying popularity. Guess which one it is. Here are some hints: it goes "waka-waka-waka-gulp," and stars a yellow dot with a big mouth (or his wife, or his child). Although some people feel the PAC-MAN craze is over, don't tell that to the people who are still playing the game. The new MS. PAC-MAN cartridge from Atari, for example, shot up to number one in sales the second week it was on the market. And SUPER PAC-MAN, the latest member of the PAC-MAN family, is also doing very well.

How do you pronounce this word: "@!#?@!"? If you're a video games player, chances are you say it "Q*BERT." If you've seen this issue's



BLIP TIPS, you know what Q*BERT is all about. The game has great graphics, fast and funny action, and a whole slew of strange sounds.

Some of Q*BERT's sounds are just beeps, or squawks. Other times, Q*BERT grunts or mumbles. And sometimes when you least expect it, it sounds as though Q*BERT is saying things that he really shouldn't be saying!

How did Gottlieb give its creation such a broad vocabulary? The answer is by not giving it any real vocabulary at all!

You see, all of the noises Q*BERT makes, from grunt to squawk to slang, are the product of a computer program that instructs the machine's voice synthesizer to string together random sounds. The synthesizer is capable of generating a whole series of odd noises. The computer tells the synthesizer to just spit it all out at certain intervals. The machine isn't *really* saying anything in particular. It is just producing random noises.

So, the next time Q*BERT says something that might make you mad, remember: it's really nothing personal.

WHERE'S THE SOFTWARE?

Buying an Atari 5200 is a little like ordering a slice of pizza and having it served on expensive dinnerware. The trimmings may be fancy, but it falls short in the substance department.

The 5200 lacks one of the most important ingredients of a successful home video game unit—software. Yes, we know the 5200 is a relatively new system. And we've been told that Atari should be given a chance to develop a wider selection of cartridges for the system.

But how much time do they need? The 5200 was introduced during last year's Christmas season. At the time this article was written, there were still only eight cartridges available for the system.

And if the small number isn't bad enough, take a look at the titles: SUPER BREAKOUT, GALAXIAN, SPACE INVADERS, STAR RAIDERS, PAC-MAN, MISSILE COMMAND, SOCCER, and DEFENDER. Seven of those eight titles are available for the Atari 2600. Only GALAXIAN is a new addition to the Atari line.

Cartridges for the 2600 aren't compatible with the 5200. So, if you buy a 5200, you'll have a grand total of eight games you'll be able to play.

"Why," you might ask, "would anybody buy this new system, especially someone who already owns a 2600?"

Well, there is at least one good answer to that question. The graphics on the 5200 are of computer quality, far better than most video game systems offer. On the other hand, most systems on the market today have better graphics than the Atari 2600.

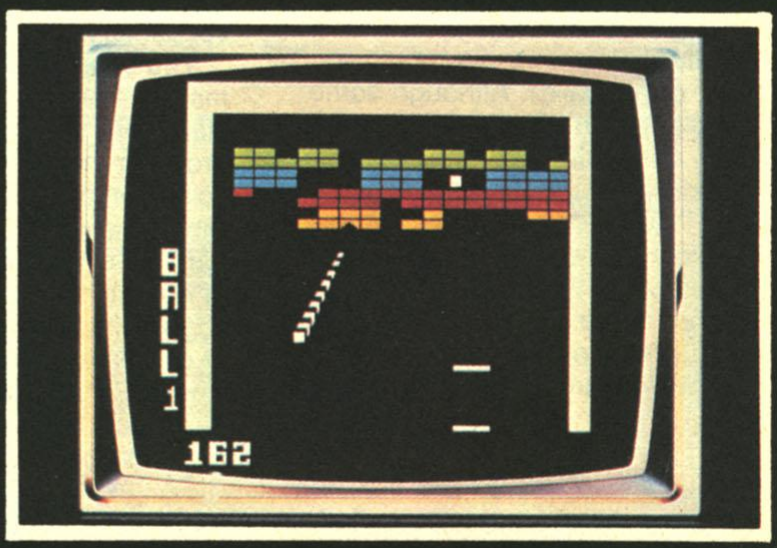
Atari has promised an adapter that will allow you to play 2600 games on the new machine. Of course, that means an extra expense.

* * *

THE CONTROLLER

Before looking at some of the games available for the 5200, a word about the hand controllers. They're unlike any other controllers we've seen, and that's both good and bad.

The controller has a keypad that accepts an overlay for each game, similar to the Intellivision controller. But it also includes a floating joystick with two new features. It moves in more directions than the 2600 stick. And the harder you push on the stick, the faster your screen character moves.



The stick works well on SOCCER and STAR RAIDERS. But it drove us crazy on SUPER BREAKOUT and SPACE INVADERS. You need precise control to play these games, and the new joystick floats too much for that.

THE GAMES

That old-time favorite, SUPER BREAKOUT, is back in a slighty different form. If you're one of those people who like the look of the old BREAKOUT, you'll love the screen on this one. The colors are more vivid, and the blocks fade from the screen when they're hit, instead of instantly disappearing. The effect is to make them look almost liquid as they dissolve from view.

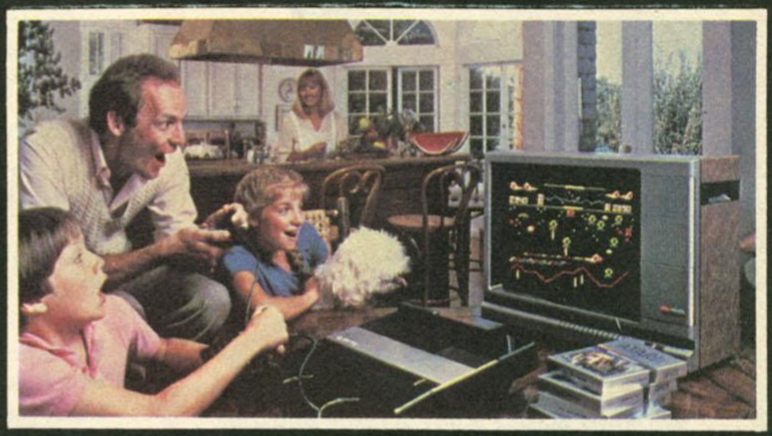
The game variations are the same as you'll find on the 2600 version. Besides the simple Breakout, there are Progressive, Double, and Cavity.

We asked several BREAKOUT champs to try out this new cartridge. Without exception, they made the same comment. The floating joystick made it impossible to place the paddle exactly where they wanted it. Exact placement is the very skill that makes a player a BREAKOUT champ. If you take away that possibility, you don't have any game left. When a champ begins depending on luck for a decent score, something is wrong.

DEFENDER was a bit of a disappointment, but not for the same reason as SUPER BREAKOUT. In spite of the generally superior graphics of the 5200, DEFENDER falls short in this department.

The first couple of times we tried the game, we couldn't make out the radar screen. The weak graphics also made it tough to see enemy fire until it was too late.

However, the problem solved itself as we got used to the screen. If you can forget what the arcade version looks like, you could learn to like the 5200 DEFENDER. (The joystick gave us trouble here, too, but it wasn't as serious a problem as we had with SUPER BREAKOUT.)



SOCCER is a game for one or two players, with teams identified by their red or blue color. Your team consists of four fielders and a goalie. You can pass from one fielder to another, and you always control the player with the ball. A major flaw in the game is that you never get to control the goalie.

You can set the difficulty level at Beginner, Novice, Intermediate, or Expert. If you're playing against the computer, the only way you'll get a challenge is to set it at Expert. At other levels, the computer doesn't offer much competition.

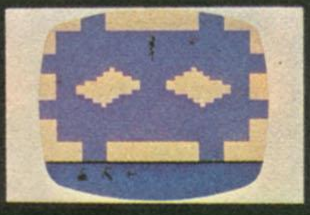
The game consists of two halves, and you can set them for a real-time length of five to 45 minutes. We found 10-minute halves long enough for a good game, but not so lengthy that the game gets tedious.

The graphics in SOCCER are very good. The players and their movements are realistic, and the shadow under the soccer ball gives a three-dimensional illusion.

In the past, Atari has had trouble producing realistic sports cartridges. It's really too bad that this one comes only with an expensive new system.

It's also too bad that the 5200 still doesn't have enough cartridges to justify its price.

—Mike Meyers



HAND-Y GAMES

Remember ELECTRONIC FOOTBALL? That was a tiny, hand-held game that starred a series of glowing dashes and "bleep-bleep" sounds. You had to maneuver one of the dashes ten times across a tiny screen, and the game would signal that you had scored a touchdown. A couple of years ago, ELECTRONIC FOOTBALL was one of the hottest items in every toy store. But the popularity of miniature electronic games didn't last very long.

Hand-held (and their larger cousins, table-top) games were quickly overshadowed by the introduction of video games systems like the Atari 2600. The mini-games were good, but people liked the TV screen games a lot more. And why spend twenty or thirty dollars for a bunch of dots and dashes, when Atari was coming out with games like SPACE INVADERS or ASTEROIDS every few weeks?

But for people who were on the go, or didn't own video game machines, the hand-held games never disappeared. And a lot of people are discovering that hand-held games offer many advantages over video games.

For one thing, the hand-helds are compact and portable. That means a hand-held game can go with you, wherever you travel. When was the last time you saw an Atari VCS on the beach or in a train?

It's true that hand-held games don't have the variety or the challenge of video games. You can't really expect a tiny, pocket-sized toy to give you the same kind of action that a mini-computer offers.

Even so, there are some hand-held games that provide a great deal of excitement. Most of the major game manufacturers are now getting into hand-helds. Some are even transforming the most popular arcade games into miniature hand-held versions.

SHRUNKEN ARCADES

Basically, there are two types of hand-held games. The first kind are relatives of the old pocket football games. These feature *Light Emitting Diodes* (LED), which are the bright red dots and dashes that you often see on digital clocks. The LED hand-held games have bright, multi-colored screens. They also use a lot of battery power.

The other kind of hand-held game is the *Liquid Crystal Display* (LCD) game, which is smaller than the LED game. LCD play-screens are usually grey, with blue or dark grey characters. These games use much less power than the LED games, but they are also a lot less challenging.

The leader in LED games is Coleco. Coleco has been making table-top games as long as anybody else in the business, and some of their adaptations are amazingly authentic.

You can't miss a Coleco game, either. They look like miniature arcade games, right down to the cabinet graphics, joysticks, and logos. All this quality and size costs money, and Coleco's units are among the most expensive portable games. Most of them cost around $50.

Some of the games Coleco has taken from the Arcade and shrunk down are PAC-MAN, DONKEY KONG, GALAXIAN and FROGGER. By the time you read this, a whole crop of new games, including DONKEY KONG JR., MS. PAC-MAN and ZAXXON, should be on the market.

Coleco's table-top ZAXXON is probably the most complex mini-game ever developed. But our favorite remains FROGGER, because, more than any other hand-held we've seen, it really captures the arcade action of the original. If it weren't for the *very loud* sound effects, in fact, we could probably spend a whole day trying to get that frog back home.

Another Coleco table-top that de-

serves mention is DONKEY KONG. We can't give DONKEY KONG an unqualified recommendation (we were spoiled by FROGGER). But we can say that it is a good game, and it can be a lot of fun. One of the problems with DONKEY KONG is that the controls are a little erratic. There is nothing more frustrating than losing a Mario for no apparent reason, which is something that seems to happen at least once a game in Coleco's DONKEY KONG.

Besides the mini-arcade series, Coleco also manufactures a whole series of traditional LED games, including HEAD-TO-HEAD FOOTBALL, BASEBALL, BASKETBALL and BOXING. The problem with these games is that they are too easy. After a few hours, almost anyone can beat the computer. Over and over and over again.

POCKET ARCADES

Then there are the smaller LCD games. Besides their tiny size, these games have another big difference that separates them from the LED games. They are usually less challenging.

But the LCD games do have one advantage over the LED units. They do more than one job. Most LCD games also act as watches, alarm clocks, or even calculators. And some LCD watches have simple games built into them. So the boredom factor is slightly offset by the fact that there is a wide variety of ways to use an LCD.

A recent innovation in LCD games is the double screen. The idea is a very simple one. Instead of just one tiny screen, game makers are now manufacturing games with two boards. The games are hinged at the center so that they can fold up for travel. This makes the action last a little bit longer, but the games also cost more.

The leader in double screen games (and also a manufacturer of single screen hand-helds as well) is Nintendo. Nintendo is one of those arcade manufacturers that have gotten into hand-helds as a profitable sideline.

Nintendo's games include DONKEY KONG, DONKEY KONG JR., DONKEY KONG II and MARIO BROTHERS. If you get the idea that Nintendo has a big thing for monkeys, you're right. But monkeys aren't all that Nin-

tendo features on their hand-held games. They are also making pocket-sized units starring Snoopy, and Mickey Mouse with Donald Duck. Also in the works are both single and double-screen versions of POPEYE.

PATTERNS FOR PLAY

Although they feature many different characters, most LCD games are basically played the same way. They usually involve one character trying to catch or destroy a stream of attackers. In POPEYE, for example, the one-eyed sailor tries to catch cans of spinach thrown at him by Olive Oyl. The games usually feature one "extra" hazard as well. In POPEYE, that hazard is the evil Bluto, who is trying to grab the hero.

Other games are similar. In Nintendo's PARACHUTE, the characters are a man in a boat and a stream of people jumping out of an airplane. You have to catch them, just as you have to catch the cans in POPEYE. In the game called FIRE, also by Nintendo, you have to move a net on the ground in order to save people who have jumped from a burning building. You get the idea.

Other companies, like TechnoTel, have also introduced hand-helds that feature the same kinds of action. In INFERNO, yet another fireman has to rescue still more victims, who are leaping out of one more burning building.

WHITE WITCH is another hand-held that features the same kind of catch-em, zap-em action. But we think that TechnoTel has done an especially good job here, because the game has a

sense of humor. A good witch is trying to save a house from a bunch of evil crows. Sometimes the crows turn into cupids. If the witch zaps one of these by mistake, she loses points.

SOUNDS OR SILENCE?

Another interesting TechnoTel feature is silent operation, which is a big plus as far as we're concerned. The noises that these little games make just aren't interesting enough to keep us amused.

Some TechnoTel games make some very interesting noises, however. The company has just introduced a new line of hand-helds that also feature a built-in AM radio, complete with Walkman-style headphones.

Casio is a company that makes many electronic products, including calculators, watches and musical keyboards.

Almost all of these products have additional game features built into them. Some of these games are just simple number, or musical, memory games. Others are more visual. One calculator features a tiny baseball field, complete with players and scoreboard!

ELECTRONIC FOOTBALL, the first hand-held game, was manufactured by Mattel. They later reduced their operations in the hand-held business for the greener pastures of video games. But now, Mattel has returned with three new LCD games.

One of Mattel's new games is BURGER TIME, an adaptation of the popular arcade unit. It's very similar in action to the games mentioned above, although it does feature a responsive joystick, rather than a series of tiny buttons, for you to operate.

ADVENTURES FROM MATTEL

The other two Mattel games are really one game in deluxe and regular versions. The different versions feature the same action, but use slightly different characters and have different

graphics and sound features. The deluxe game, MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE, has an alarm clock built into it. The regular version, DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, is game-only.

No matter which version you choose, the fun in these games remains the same. MASTERS/D&D is one of the best hand-held games we've tried, because it makes you think. Other games are just frantic button-pressing toys. Here, you can take your time. There isn't anybody to catch, and there are no people falling out of the sky.

You start the game situated on a 10x10 grid. You can only see the box that you are in. If you have a good memory, you can visualize the rest of the grid. If your memory is not so good, a pencil and paper might help.

The idea is to move about the grid, avoiding traps and trying to find weapons and tools that will help you destroy an evil demon, who's hiding somewhere on the grid. In MASTERS, you're searching for a key, a sword, and a monster named Skeletor. In D&D, you look for a rope, an arrow, and an evil dragon.

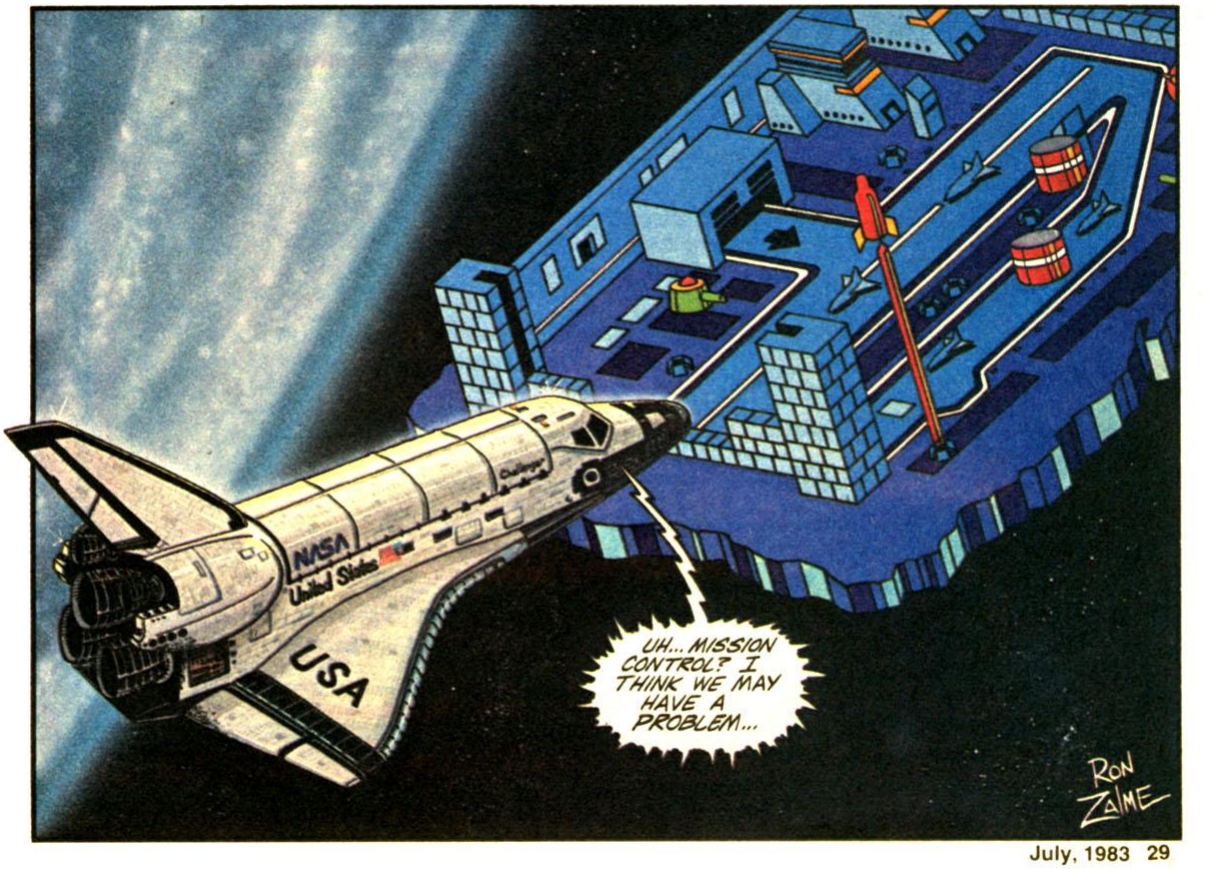
Both games also feature a couple of dangers to avoid. MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE requires you to be on the lookout for a jail cell and a barbarian bird. DUNGEONS pits you against a sunken pit, and a vampire bat.

Unlike the typical hand-held game, most of the action in Mattel's adventure series goes on in your brain. This is good, because it means that you can get *many* more hours of fun from the Mattel games than from any old hand-held.

All the LCD games mentioned above cost about $25, and if you search around, you can probably find similar games for less than that.

Although hand-held games aren't anywhere near as complex as video games, they might just stay with us longer. This is because video games are being pushed aside by computers that cost the same, but do a lot more than games systems.

But so far, nobody has invented a genuine computer that can go with you anywhere and is affordable. The average game-playing portable computer still costs at least hundreds of dollars —a price tag that is, for most people, quite out of reach.



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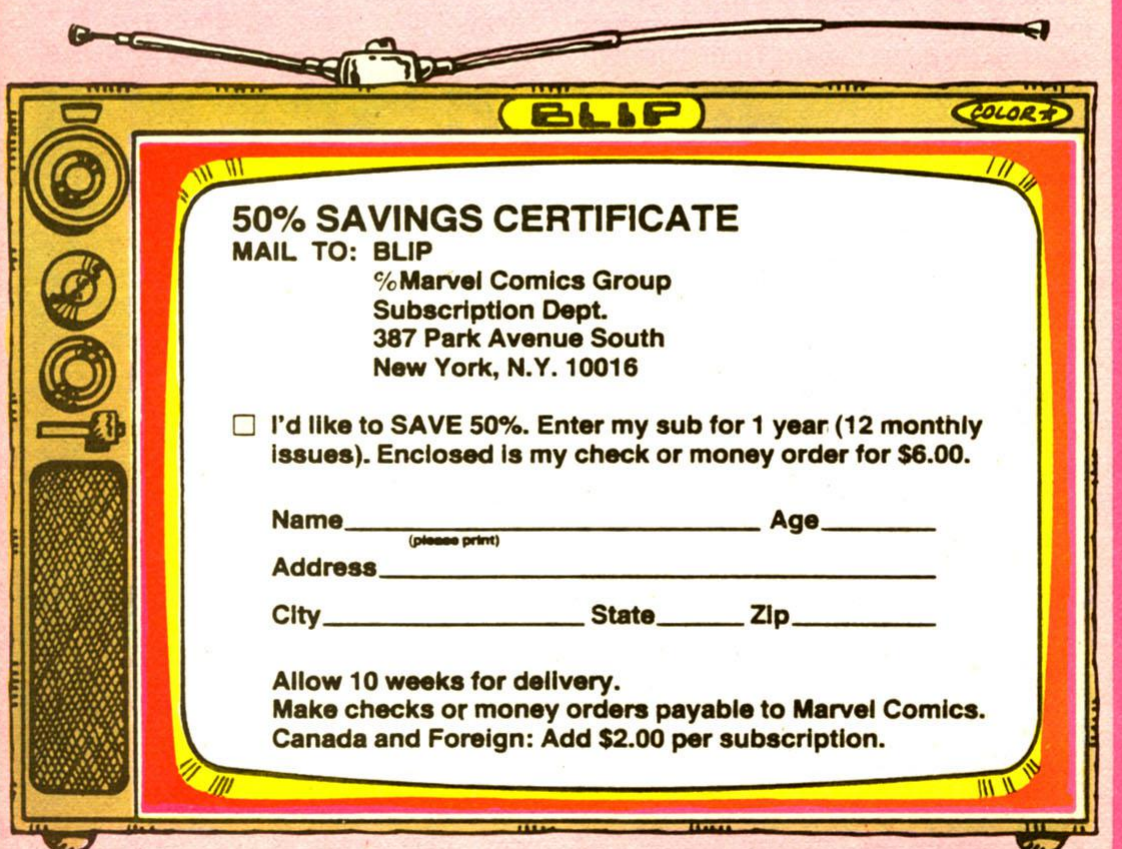

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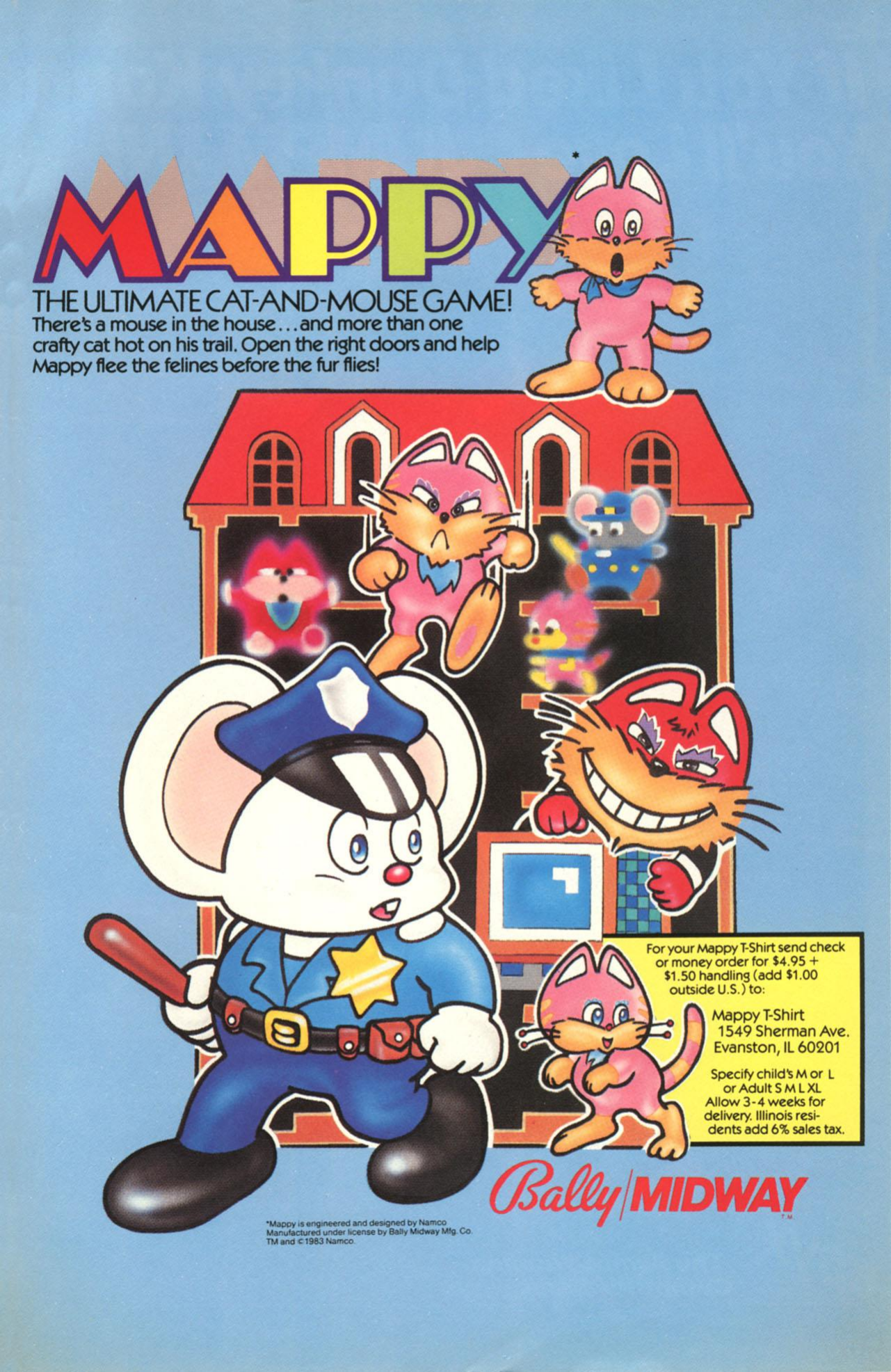
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